

8th Grade Social Studies

First Contact / Unit #2

Unit Overview

Compelling Question: How do we evaluate the impact of contact between societies?

In this unit, we will investigate how interactions between different cultures shape societies as we explore our compelling question. Throughout the unit, students will examine how geography influenced the rich diversity of Indigenous cultures in North America prior to European arrival, evaluate primary sources - such as Columbus's journals and de Las Casas's writings - to explore differing perspectives, and analyze the transformative global effects of the Columbian Exchange. By examining historical case studies alongside modern examples, students will refine critical thinking skills, evaluating the limitations and biases of historical sources as they build nuanced, evidence-based arguments. Ultimately, students will apply these historical insights to consider how societies today can engage in ethical, mutually beneficial relationships.

Significant concepts/content/skills

Our inquiry into the compelling question will be guided by the following supporting questions:

- How did geography shape the diversity of Indigenous societies in North America before European contact?
- How did encounters between Indigenous societies and Europeans change both groups?
- What factors determine whether contact between societies leads to cooperation or conflict?

We will develop the following skills as we explore these questions:

Geographic Thinking

- I can explain how physical geography and natural environments shaped the culture, technology, and structure of Indigenous societies.



Source Analysis & Evidentiary Limitations

- I can analyze primary sources to identify an author's background, motives, and potential biases.
- I can detect data gaps and limitations in historical records to identify missing perspectives and information.

Historical Perspective & Cause and Effect

- I can analyze the causes and consequences of encounters between societies, including the human and biological impacts of the Columbian Exchange.
- I can evaluate multiple historical perspectives to understand how different groups experienced the same events.

Evidence-Based Reasoning & Counter-Arguments

- I can construct a nuanced claim statement supported by evidence from multiple sources.
- I can develop claims and counterclaims while acknowledging the limitations of my own argument.
- I can evaluate complex variables to explain why interactions lead to cooperation or conflict.

Assessments & Pacing

The unit should wrap up around the end of October.

Graded Assessments

- Unit Skills Assessment, Part 1 - Geographic Analysis and Environmental Adaptation
- Unit Skills Assessment, Part 2 - Detecting Limitations in the Historical Record
- CER Argument Assessment - Communicating Historical Claims Supported by Evidence

Should I have any questions or concerns about your child's progress during this unit, I will contact you. Should you have questions or concerns, please email your child's social studies teacher at landerson@acsamman.edu.jo or eyateman@acsamman.edu.jo